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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

With which is incorporated "THE MUSICAL REVIEW,"
AUGUST 1st, 1853.

MENDELSSOHN'S "ST. PAUL."

Contributed by G. A. MACFARREN.

(Continued from page 214.)

No. 2.—This and the following piece constitute what may be considered a kind of prologue to the work, analogous, more or less, to the invocation to the muse with which Milton opens his "Paradise Lost," according to the manner of many, if not most of the extensive poetical works of ancient and modern times. The subject of these two pieces comprises the acknowledgment of the greatness of the Creator, the petition that he will give strength to his people to contend with their enemies and to preach his word, and the thanksoffering for his bountiful protection. The texts here brought together allude directly to the Apostle and his divine mission, the progress of which forms the action of the Oratorio; and they are also, perhaps indirectly, applicable to the composer, whose sacred province as an artist is, by clothing truth in beauty, by refining doctrine into poetry, to carry on the great work of the first teachers, quickening our knowledge into feeling, idealizing our sense of good with the sentiment of loveliness, and thus to stimulate through the subtle agency of our imagination such innermost emotions as are intangible alike by fact and argument.

This being the purport of the words, the music is harmoniously also of a didactic character, dignified and earnest, but not solemn—bright, broad, energetic, and simple. The introductory bars of symphony and the opening vocal phrase, "Lord! thou alone art God," which is continuous of them, have a noble majesty that finely embodies the exultant feeling expressed in the exclamation. The stately motion of the accompaniment is arrested for the clearer enunciation of the words "And thine are the Heavens, the Earth, and mighty Waters," which are thus given with true grandeur of effect to which the masterly transition into D that marks the first repetition of the sentence with a brightness that seems unsurpassable, eminently conduces. The fugal treatment of the passage on the words, "The heathens furiously rage against thee," is no less pertinent to their expression than is the agitated character of the accompaniment, the restless motion of which is maintained with admirable continuity, but without any approach to monotony. This troubled character is preserved by the further continuance of the same figure of accompaniment, while the sustained pianissimo of

the voices replaces the feeling of complaint with that of supplication when the Almighty is invoked to look upon the prevailing power of our foes, and to give his servants strength to extend his word. Here, the opening subject is with great propriety resumed; and then, a very condensed recapitulation of the principal ideas of the movement forms a powerful Coda that closes in vigorous grandeur with the simple enunciation of the words comprised in the prayer.

It is here to remark upon the careful husbandry of his orchestral resources that especially characterises the instrumentation of Mendelssohn. In the present Chorus we have an example, of which the Oratorio furnishes many, of how his power lies in the strength of his ideas rather than in the noise of his instrumentation, and by his sparing employment of these means he almost infinitely redoubles their effect whenever he takes advantage of them, and at the same time gives a variety of color to the entire work which wonderfully enhances its interest.

No. 3.—The calm, reposeful, gentle sense of gratitude is beautifully rendered in the simple character of the Choral "To God on high," as it is here presented, in harmony of plain counterpoint, and without even the ornament of the very customary interludes between the strains. The melody of this Choral is one of the most modern in its phraseology, and certainly one of the most sympathetic of all these primitive offerings of our art to the service of the Reformed Church, and its popularity may be inferred from Bach having harmonized it in no less than four different ways in his countless collection of Lutheran Hymns, which indicates that it is in such very frequent requisition, as not only gives opportunity for the employment of these several renderings, but exacts this various treatment as the necessary means of varying its effect.

It is rather the province of the schoolmaster than of the critic to enter upon the discussion of points of grammar, and I shall therefore, throughout these remarks, esteem myself happily exempt from any such disquisition—for which, in fact, except as a medium of eulogy, the present work presents the rarest opportunities. To vindicate the candour of my else unqualified admiration, I owe it to myself, and still more to my subject, to avow that in the technical treatment of some of these pieces of plain harmony there occur some progressions, the irregularity of which only eludes observation under cover of the general effect, the absorbing interest of which incapacitates us from regarding minutenesses of detail that might contribute to what they cannot destroy. I speak with diffidence, not in ostentation, and, having said, believe I have discharged a duty for which I shall gain no more thanks than credit. There needs not to proceed tediously into particulars, avoiding which I shall leave the exceptional passages still

open to the admiration of those who are insensitive to their impropriety, whereby I shall escape the art-evil of checking the impulse to find beauty and to acknowledge it, while this general declaration will, to those who share my scruples, justify the expressions of delight that the examination of this noble work of genius cannot fail ceaselessly to induce.

The transition into F sharp minor that marks Mendelssohn's treatment of the fifth strain of this Choral is very striking, and the effect of the whole is beautifully appropriate.

No. 4.—Thus doubly prefaced,—by the Overture which, we may suppose, epitomises the subject of the entire work, and by the two first vocal pieces, which invoke Heaven for the blessing of “strength and joyfulness” to qualify the artist for his sacred task,—thus doubly prefaced, the action of the Oratorio commences.

In the selection and arrangement of the text, the composer has chosen to precede the entry of his principal character by such a representation of the times in which he appeared, and the circumstances by which his appearance was surrounded, as prepares us at once to appreciate the importance of St. Paul's mission and the transition his character undergoes when the oppressor of Christians becomes the apostle of Christianity. Accordingly, the incidents of the arraignment and martyrdom of St. Stephen are presented at such very considerable length as alone could do justice to their powerful interest, and thus is shown the enthusiastic zeal of the first teachers and the fanatical violence of those who opposed them.

In the present piece is related the unanimity of the believers, the faith and power of Stephen who works wonders amongst them, the inability of the Scribes to resist the influence of his wisdom, their suborning of men to speak against him, the declaration of these that they heard his blasphemy, and the activity of the Synagogue to excite the people and the elders, who seize him and drag him before the Council.

The narrative portion of this is rendered in a Recitative for soprano solo, an episode in which is the short Duet for two basses personating the false Witnesses, that graphically distinguishes the dramatic or personal words of the text from the narrative,—that which is done or said from that which is related.

Brief as is the Duet, the peculiar character of this carefully-considered fragment (expressed in the responsive phrases of the voices, and in the points of imitation carried through the ceaseless motion of the murmuring accompaniment, singularly colored by the orchestral distribution, which lies entirely between the viola, two violoncellos, and the double bass supported by the organ pedals,) this peculiar character embodies a deep, though, perhaps therefore, not very obvious meaning, to penetrate which is quite worth the

pains of an examination. Let us suppose, then, in the plausible phraseology in which the words of the Witnesses are conveyed, and in the reiterated corroboration by each of the testimony of the other, the most sedulous endeavour to justify by persuasion and to vindicate by asseveration the charge preferred, while the falsehood and the consequent cautious inconfidence of the speakers is indicated in the suppressed perturbation that forms an undercurrent of the whole. These men are not of the People, crying, under the misdirection of fanaticism, for what they believe to be justice upon a blasphemer, but they are the suborned Witnesses of the Synagogue, hired to inflame with their purposed perjury the fury of the multitude, conscious of their hollowness, and careful to conceal their falsehood and their shame in it. Such is, to me, the reading of the text embodied in the music.

The short Duet leaves off, (closes, one cannot say, since what succeeds is still continuous,) the Duet leaves off with a dominant cadence, and an abrupt transition introduces the resumption of the Recitative. The new tonality, the hurried movement, and the addition to the score of the acute instruments, induce a contrast of color that forcibly illustrates the situation. We pass from the Witnesses to their employers, from their plausibility to the wrath that engages this as its insidious and certain engine.

We are now led to the next Chorus, of which both words and music of this number are introductory.

No. 5.—Here we have the accusation of Stephen embodied in a Chorus of the People of Jerusalem. This comprises alternate declarations to the Council and addresses to the prisoner, the unanimous rendering of the former of which presents well the vehement earnestness of the excited multitude, as does the fugal treatment of the latter their impatience each to have a voice in the taunts to which he is submitted,—each to be foremost in charging him personally with the outrage for which they demand vengeance. The dramatic power thus displayed could not be exceeded, and the technical treatment of the scene equals the poetical purpose with which it is conceived.

The fierceness of the infuriate crowd, who, rushing tumultuously, without regard of place or person, into the judgment hall, eagerly denounce their intended victim as a blasphemer against Moses and against God,—their charge to him, “Did we not enjoin and straightly command you that you should not teach in the name you follow? and lo! you have filled Jerusalem with these unlawful doctrines,”—and their turning wildly again with their first appeal to the Council, this is depicted with a living truthfulness that brings the raging multitude in actual existence before us, and makes us know and feel how

terrible is the power of the bad passions of man, and how dreadful an engine are they to set in action. Thus much is comprised in what we may esteem the First Part or division of the movement; and the malignant scorn with which Stephen is still regarded when the voices cease—and the looks of hatred cast upon him are even more redundant of vengeance than the limited words—is not less powerfully presented in the few threatening bars of symphony with their entirely unique and most poignant instrumentation.

Less irritated, and therefore much more dignified in character, is the episode for male voices in which the accusation against Stephen is directly preferred. A transient modulation into C at the words "destroy all these our holy places," is one of the brightest points in the whole Chorus, and one that derives from its great simplicity a power to which nobody can be insensible.

The multitude is not to be restrained. With violent agitation, aggravated by its temporary suppression, the mass of the People resume their original cry of denunciation, and the dramatic and the musical effect of this recurrence of the chief theme of the movement are both heightened by the addition of a florid counterpoint of semiquavers against the Subject that is admirably sustained. The resumption of the episodic idea, now distributed among the full chorus, and supported by the agitated accompaniment of the string instruments, forms a climax to the close of the movement that seems to raise this grand point of culmination still higher and higher as it approaches it, and then, the repetition of the very individual bars for the orchestra that seem, in their tone of exultant derision, to anticipate the tortures with which the martyr is menaced, this very powerful conception is concluded.

No. 6.—A few bars of Recitative for soprano, resuming the narrative, tell how they look upon his face and it is like the face of an angel (an expression most gracefully rendered in the music), and how the High Priest demands if these charges be true, his words being separated from the more indifferent tone of relation in the third person by an impressive change of key, and by a slower and consequently more impressive enunciation.

Stephen's defence is rendered in a grand declamatory Recitative for tenor, that, as a piece of musical eloquence, is scarcely to be reached by the highest eulogium with which enthusiastic admiration could attempt to do it justice. Commencing with the majestic calmness that is inspired by conscious right and complete mastery of the subject upon which he is to discourse, the orator gradually rises with the development of his theme in warmth of expression and energy of delivery, until the flood of his speech would seem to have accumulated such intensity of power as must bear down all before it. One cannot too

much admire the consummate art wherewith this is embodied, but, the more must one admire, the less can one define. The felicitous artifice of the frequent repetition, at irregular periods, of the two bars of symphony that introduce the character of Stephen, each repetition being successively in a higher and higher key—thus much admits of description—all else of the forcible treatment of this impressive scene must be left to the appreciation of the hearer.

The multitude, awed by the fervid eloquence of their purposed victim, and feeling the growing influence of his words, become impatient of a power that may be withdrawn but cannot be resisted. In low mutterings, that bespeak how much less is their can than their will to oppose him, they interrupt what they are unable to answer with murmurs of "Take him away!" Then, gaining assurance from the sound of their own voices, and mutual encouragement from the coward's panoply, the knowledge of physical superiority, they break forth in a fierce exclamation of a life-thirsty fanaticism, "He shall perish!"

Passing direct from the harmony of E flat to the second inversion of D, the first employment of this major tonic, the single voice of Stephen is introduced with an effect of beautiful, of glorious radiance, that, to say the least—and words could say no more—realises the idea his language conveys when he declares, "Lo! I see the heavens open, and the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God."

How far the immediate dispersion of the visionary brightness may be more or less true to the situation, or more or less necessary as a means of art to certify its brilliancy, and how far the whole musical idea may be more or less analogous to that which first introduces Anna and Ottavio in the sextet in *Don Giovanni*, I leave for the speculation of those whose delight in present beauty is sufficiently temperate to allow them to turn from its contemplation to theorise upon its source;—for me, I am content to admire and to acknowledge.

To be continued.

CHURCH ORGANISTS.

WE have frequently felt it our duty, as one of the representatives of the musical profession, to request the attention of the public, and particularly of those officers in the church who have any control over it, musical service, to the inadequate remuneration of Church Organists. This fact of course is productive of many of the evils complained of by the more intelligent members of our metropolitan congregations. Why the Organist (who must have received, if he be moderately qualified for his situation, at least an average general as well as musical education) should be the only officer of the church who is so poorly paid, we have never been able to understand. The beadle, in all the "pride and pomp" of gold lace, rejoices in a salary of some sixty pounds a year, and doubtless